

# Activity Guide



**Special Olympics**  
Wisconsin

**youngathletes™**

# young athletes™ ...

Welcome to Special Olympics Wisconsin Young Athletes!

At Special Olympics Wisconsin we firmly believe that it is through the power of sports that individuals begin to develop physical fitness, create friendships, share respect, display courage, and experience joy. While Special Olympics has continued to provide those opportunities for athletes ages eight and older since 1968, it is now with great enthusiasm that we are able to offer the opportunity for children ages two through seven to receive those same benefits through Young Athletes.

The Young Athletes activities in this guide allow children with cognitive disabilities and their peers to develop basic sports techniques while building social skills that will last a lifetime. Through running, jumping, throwing, catching, striking, and kicking, participants will advance their motor tracking, eye-hand coordination, and ability to relate these capabilities to sports. While advancing these skills, this program also provides meaningful interaction for all children to learn the values of inclusion, teamwork, and respect.

It is our belief that Young Athletes serves as an avenue for families to network with each other and learn about the support offered through Special Olympics Wisconsin. We also believe that awareness will be raised in the community about the diverse abilities of children which is a benefit to all.

Special Olympics Wisconsin is proud to offer this exciting program and we hope the Young Athletes activities not only facilitate growth in a child, but also offer parents and other children tools to grow, to play together, and to become stronger in many ways. Once again, welcome to the world of Special Olympics and through Young Athletes...the beginning of a lifetime of achievement and success through sports.

Best Wishes to All,



Dennis Alldridge  
President and CEO  
Special Olympics Wisconsin

**“It’s a wonderful program for parents with children who have special needs.”**

**- Susan WaldKirch, Parent  
Cedarburg, Wisconsin**



**“It gets Kids active and interacting with each other.”**

**-Julie Burmesch, Principal  
Wausau, Wisconsin**



**“Watching my four-year-old participate was phenomenal. It helped him learn to kick and jump.”**

**-Erin Radke, Parent  
Wausau, Wisconsin**





**“This is an excellent program for children of ALL abilities. It helps them to experience success personally and physically.”**

**-Tanya Husby, Parent  
Menomonie, Wisconsin**



**“Everyone gets the opportunity to shine! Kids have fun playing together, but they also learn from and teach each other.”**

**-Karyn Malnory, Volunteer  
Eau Claire, Wisconsin**



# About young athletes™

Young Athletes is an innovative sports play program for children with and without cognitive disabilities, designed to introduce them to the world of sports prior to Special Olympics eligibility for competition at age eight.

Young Athletes introduces children with cognitive disabilities, their peers, and families to the world of Special Olympics by pursuing the following goals:

- (1) engage children with cognitive disabilities through developmentally appropriate play activities designed to foster physical, intellectual and social development;
- (2) welcome family members of children with cognitive disabilities to the Special Olympics network of support;
- (3) raise awareness about the abilities of children with cognitive disabilities through inclusive peer participation, demonstrations and other events.

Young Athletes is a versatile program that can work in various learning situations. Families can play with their youngsters at home in a fun atmosphere, using simple-to-follow activities. The program is also appropriate for kindergarten, schools and playgroups to use with small groups of young children with and without cognitive disabilities.

Before conducting Youth Athletes activities, families, teachers, and/or coaches should familiarize themselves with the activities by observing the DVD to learn the proper execution of the skills. Always demonstrate the skills when explaining them to others.

In addition to Young Athletes, Special Olympics Wisconsin games and competitions are occurring year-round throughout the state and we encourage you to attend as either a spectator or a volunteer. This will further prepare children for Special Olympics competition after they graduate from Young Athletes.

# Equipment

In addition to this Activity Guide, Young Athletes includes several resources to assist family members, educators and other professionals as they conduct the program with their children, brothers, sisters, cousins, grandchildren, students or patients. Items include a training DVD, which provides video of children performing the activities, and an equipment kit, which contains the materials below:

*Note: Additional equipment that may be used include: junior size basketball, junior size plastic golf club, junior size plastic hockey stick, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, plastic bat, rope, tee, or tennis ball.*



**Balance Beam**

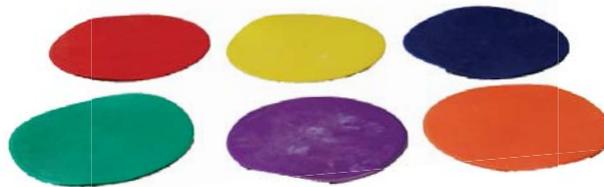
**Inflatable Balls**



**Bean Bags**



**Cones/Dowels**

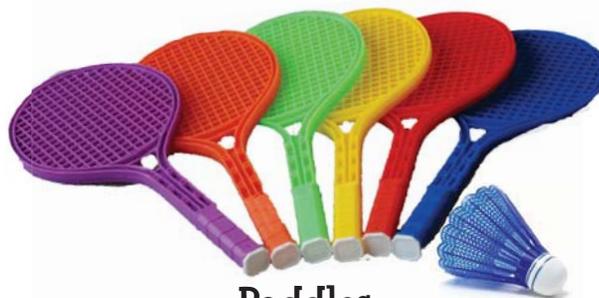


**Floor Markers**



**Hoops/ HOLDERS**

**Scarves**



**Paddles**

**Small Balls**



# Activities



1. Foundational Skills

2. Walking & Running

3. Balance & Jumping

4. Trapping & Catching

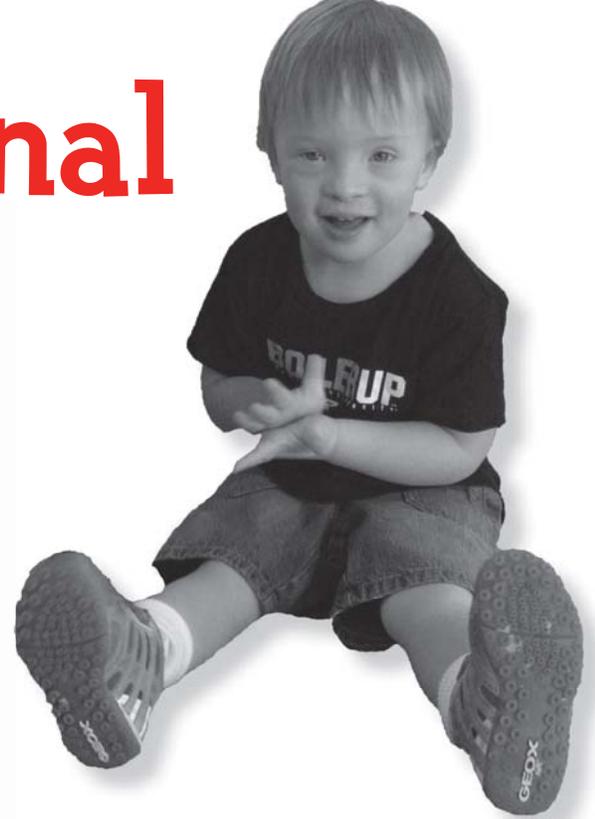
5. Throwing

6. Striking

7. Kicking

8. Advanced Skills

# Foundational Skills



## "If You're Happy and You Know It"

Sing this well-known action song and encourage the child to perform the activities. Try replacing "clapping" with stomp your feet, rub your belly, shake your body, tap your head, etc.



## Scarf Games scarf

Encourage the child to follow the movement of the scarf with his/her head and eyes. Try dropping the scarf and encourage the child to "catch" the scarf with his/her hand, head, elbow, foot, etc.

## Sports Song (Sing with the melody of "The Wheels on the Bus")

Encourage the child to perform the actions of the song. Use motions you have seen the child do spontaneously. See if they can be replicated on cue from the songs.

For example: "The goalie in the game will stop the ball, stop the ball, stop the ball. The goalie in the game will stop the ball, all day long."



### Observations & Tips

Use high energy and enthusiasm to encourage participation in all the activities. Make note of the child's ability to remember lyrics, activities and/or body parts and reinforce those areas in other activities such as eating and dressing.



## "I Spy With My Little Eye..."

floor markers, bean bags

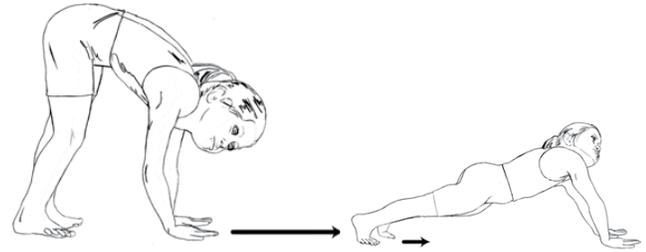
A player calls out the name of an object that is visible and then everyone races to the object by walking, running, crawling, etc. Progress the game by calling out a feature of an object (color, shape, etc). If it is a color (e.g. blue) each player can go to a different object that is blue. Players can also go in pairs if someone is challenged by colors or shapes.

### Observations & Tips

Make note of the concepts the child has mastered and those that are still developing (e.g., Knows on/off, not up/down; identifies red, not blue). Incorporate concepts during play and other activities such as giving directions to moving around stationary objects like a couch or crawl under a table to retrieve a play toy.

## Inchworm Wiggle

Bend forward so that hands and feet are on the ground and encourage movement like an inchworm by walking the hands forward and then walking the feet up to the hands.



## Obstacle Course

cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels

Encourage verbal, color recognition, object recognition and counting development by calling out colors, names and numbers of objects used in each activity. Ask children to repeat the objects you reference, including their name, color and number. Set up cones, hoops, and other objects to have the child play "follow the leader." Sing or chant the activities you are doing, such as: over/under, around/between, on/off, slow/fast.

## Bridges and Tunnels



Tunnel: One player forms a tunnel by touching the ground with his/her feet and hands or by getting down onto hands and knees (all-fours). The other player crawls, scoots, walks or runs through the tunnel.

Bridges: One player forms a bridge by sitting with his/her feet and hands flat on the ground and pushing his/her bottom up in the air. The other player crawls, scoots, walks or runs under the bridge.

## Bunny Hop

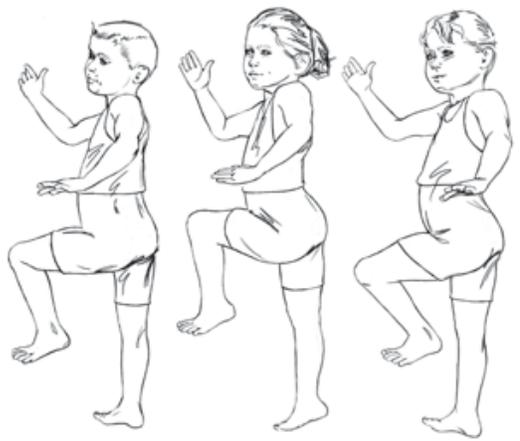
Bend forward so that hands and feet are on the ground and encourage the child to hop like a bunny by moving the hands forward and then hopping the feet up to the hands.

### Observations & Tips

Make note of approximately how many times the child can perform the activity (inchworm wiggle, bunny hop) or how long the child can hold up the bridge or tunnel. Encourage more repetitions or a faster time over several weeks to develop muscular strength and endurance. Encourage bridges and tunnels to be rigid and strong while people and objects pass under and through.

# 2

# Walking & Running



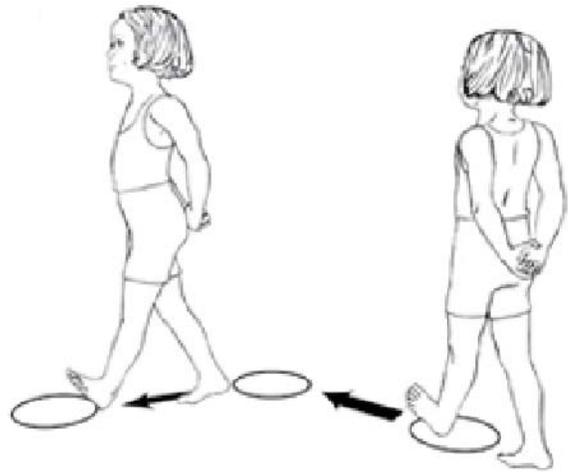
## Follow the Leader

Encourage the child to “follow the leader” as you walk in different ways (slow, fast, march, etc.) and move different parts of your body (arms up, arms out, etc.)

## Follow the Path

cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels

Encourage the child to follow a path marked with hoops, cones or markers.



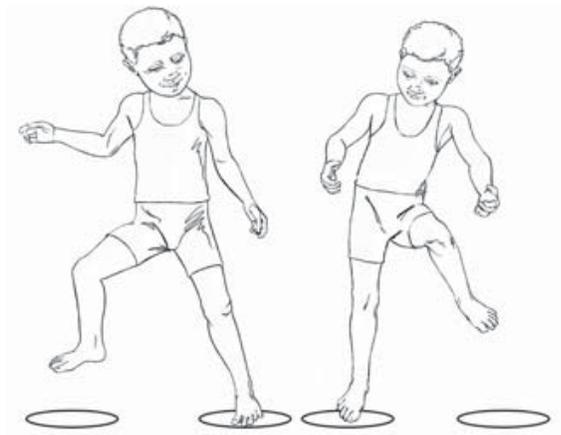
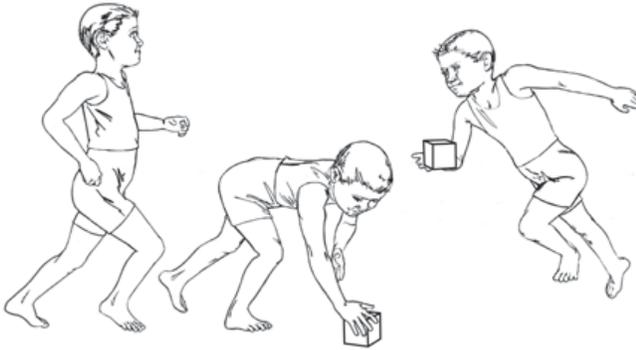
## Observations & Tips

Encourage the child not to crouch or make movements when walking or sidestepping and to keep his/her hips and feet facing forward. Try placing a bean bag on the child's head to encourage good posture and balance.

## Side Stepping

floor markers, bean bags

Encourage the child to side step right and left onto a variety of markers. Objects can be placed on markers several feet away that the child can retrieve and place on a different marker.



## Run and Carry

bean bags

Encourage the child to run a distance, pick up an object from the ground and run back to the starting point. Repeat several times for endurance training.

## Obstacle Course

cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels

Set up cones, markers, hoops, etc., and encourage the child to walk, crawl, climb, jump or run through/around a series of obstacles. Begin with a straight course with similar activities at each “station” and progress to including a variety of tasks, zig-zags, reversals, etc.



## Running Styles

Demonstrate different types of running (slow, fast, backward, etc.) Decide on a command signal that the child likes (e.g., whistle, clap, saying “Now” or “Change”). Each time the command signal is called, the child must change the running style.

### Observations & Tips

If arms are swinging across the body or not in opposition with the legs, work on this while standing or running in place. If foot slapping is noticed or heard, encourage toe-running and heel-running. If the stride length is too small, encourage the child to step or run between or onto markers.

# 3

## Jumping & Balance

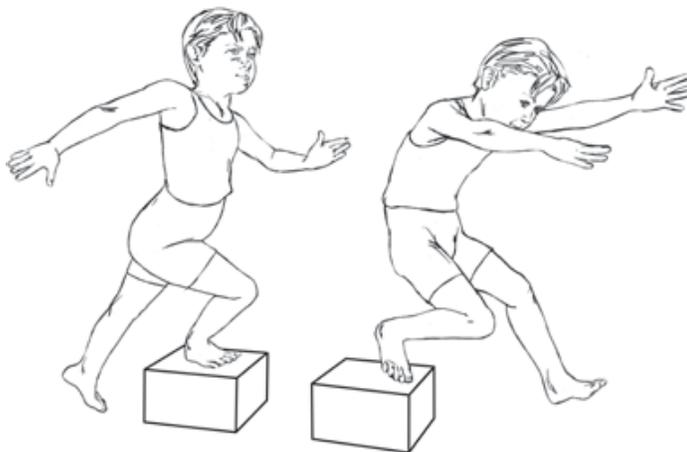


### Frog Hoppin'/Leapin' Lizards floor markers

For frog hoppin', encourage the child to jump forward from one marker to the next. Progress to leapin' lizards by encouraging the child to run forward and leap into the air either over or onto a marker.

### Step and Jump balance beam, floor markers

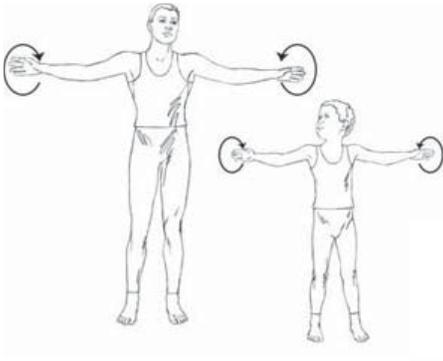
Encourage the child to step up onto a balance beam and then jump down from it. Progress by having the child 1) jump further out onto a marker, 2) jump down from higher steps or surfaces.



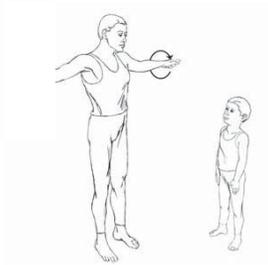
#### Observations & Tips

If the child takes off or lands flat-footed, encourage leaning forward and bending the knees. If leaping is difficult for the child, run along the child's side, holding his/her hand and practice leaping onto a marker over an object.

## “Coach Says”



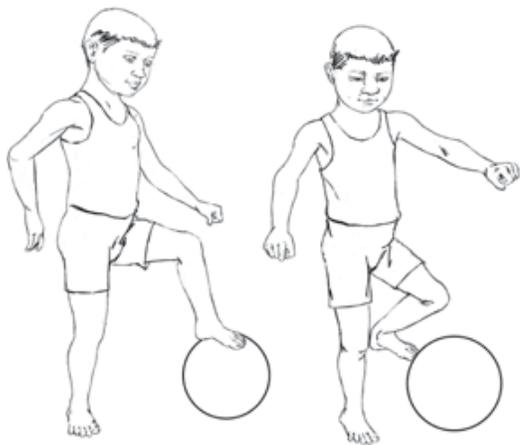
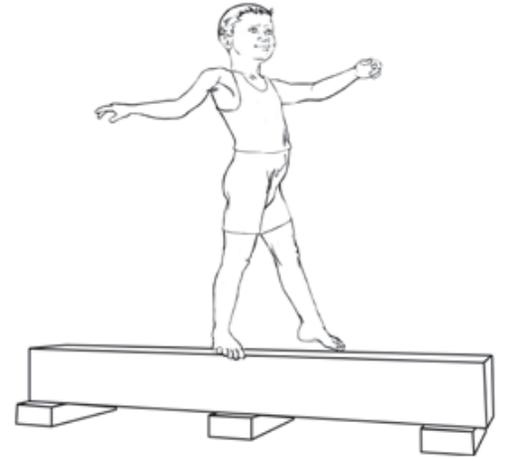
Ask the child to copy your movements and assume different positions. Encourage the child to perform actions that require balance, such as standing on tiptoes or wheels, standing with one foot directly in front of the other, or standing on one foot.



## Balance Beam

balance beam, rope

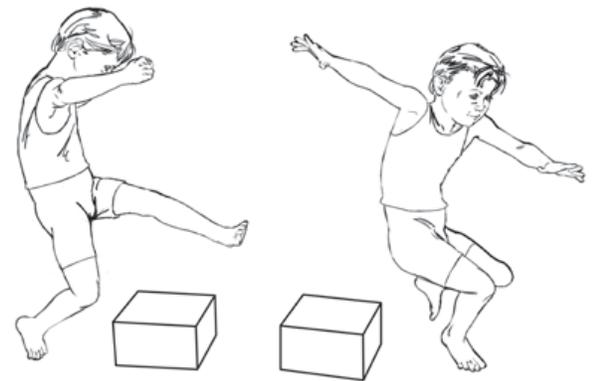
Follow a straight path, walking along a rope or balance beam. Progress to straddling the rope or beam while walking, then walk on top of the rope or beam.



## Foot Trap

slow motion or junior size soccer ball

Have the child place his/her foot on top of the ball and maintain balance before kicking the ball. Progress by having the child trap a ball that is rolled slowly toward him/her.



## Jumping High

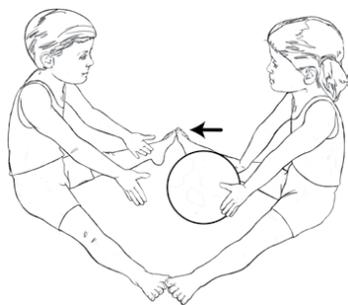
dowel, rope, floor markers

Encourage the child to jump over a dowel, rope or marker. Or encourage the child to jump up and grab an object. If the child cannot clear feet from the floor, encourage jumping up for an object while “jumping down” from a step.

### Observations & Tips

Encourage the child to mimic your movements during “Coach Says.” Try placing a bean bag on the child’s head to encourage good posture and balance. Encourage landing with two feet at the same time.

# Trapping & Catching



## Rolling and Trapping

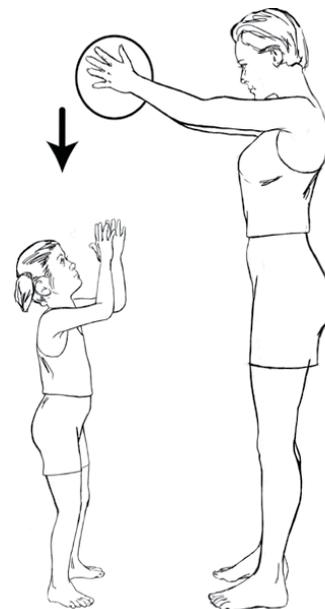
slow motion ball, small foam ball, tennis ball

Sit opposite the child with legs outstretched in a straddle position, so that legs are touching and a diamond shape is formed. Roll the ball to each other and catch/stop it with your hands. Progress this activity so that you're kneeling or standing.

## Big Ball Catch

beach ball, slow motion ball

Stand facing the child and slowly bring the ball toward the child. Repeat several times, moving more quickly each time. Next, have the child grab the ball from your hands. Then, tell him/her that the ball will be let go right before it reaches his/her hands. Practice this several times before actually tossing the ball.



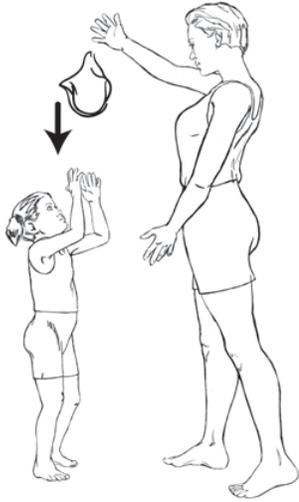
### Observations & Tips

Eyes should be focused on the ball. Fingers should be spread apart and facing down when rolling or catching a ball that's below the waist. The ball should be controlled with the hands only, not the chest, legs, etc.

## Goalie Drill

slow motion ball, cones

Have the child stand in front of two cones that have been set up to form a goal. Encourage the child to stop the ball with his/her hands so that the ball doesn't roll between the cones.



## Bean Bag Catch

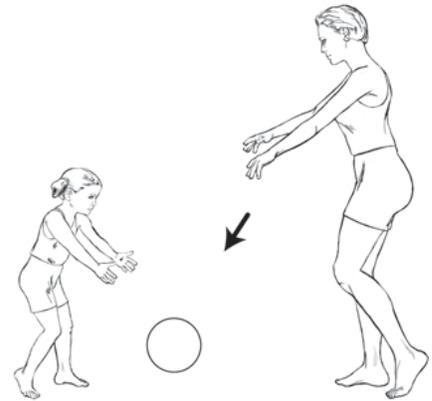
bean bag

Stand facing the child and repeat the process of the Big Ball Catch using a small bean bag. Encourage the child to catch the bean bag with one hand.

## Bounce Catch

beach ball, slow motion ball

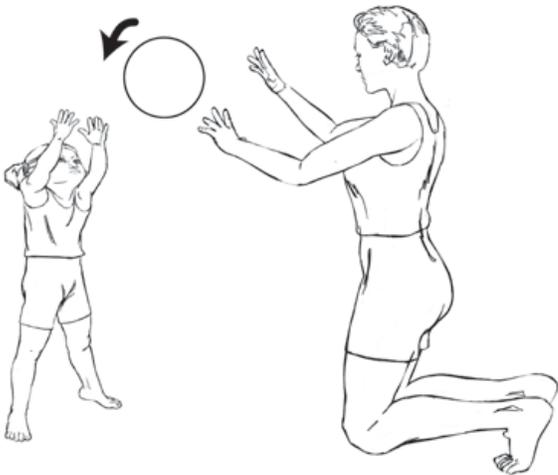
Face the child and bounce a beach ball or fairly large ball so the child can catch the ball without moving. Progress to moving further away and using smaller balls.



## High ball Catch

beach ball, slow motion ball

Kneel facing the child, who is about three feet away. Gently toss a beach ball or fairly large ball to the child and encourage catching the ball with fingers pointing up. Be sure the toss is done from the chest level and with the fingers pointing up. Progress by moving further away and mixing up high and low tosses.



### Observations & Tips

Eyes should be focused on the target. Fingers should be pointing down when catching a ball that approaches below the waist and pointing up when the ball approaches above the waist.

# 5

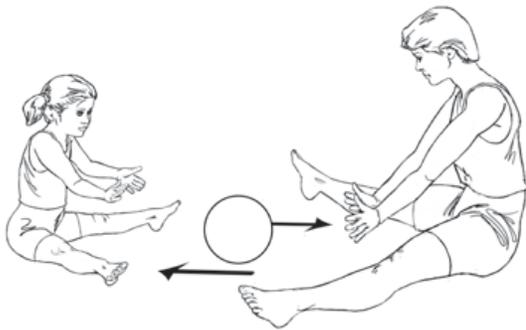
# Throwing



## Rolling

slow motion ball, cones

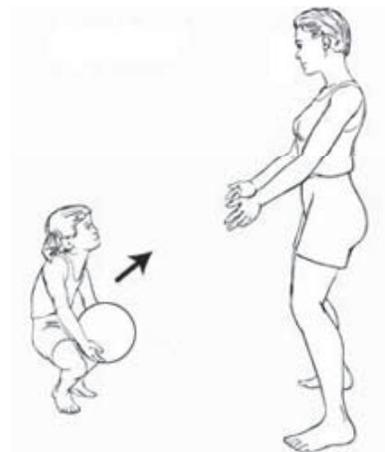
Sit on the ground with your legs straight out to the side and roll a ball back and forth. Progress this activity so that you're rolling the ball from half-kneeling or standing. Encourage the child to roll a ball from a standing position so that it passes between two cones to score a goal.



## Two-Hand Underhand Toss

slow motion ball

Encourage the child to stand with bent knees and hold an inflatable ball or fairly large ball with two hands. Ask the child to look at your hands and toss the ball underhand to you.



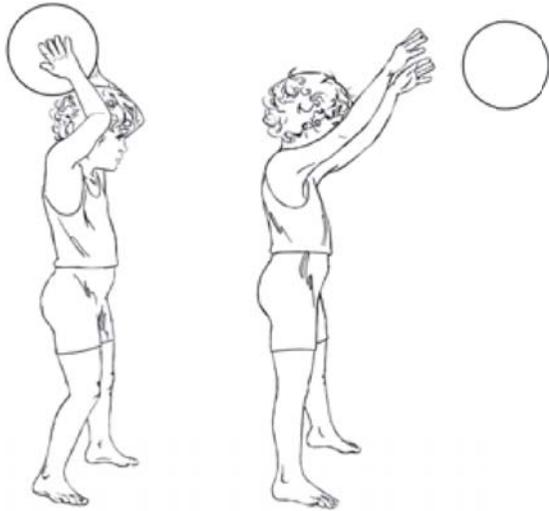
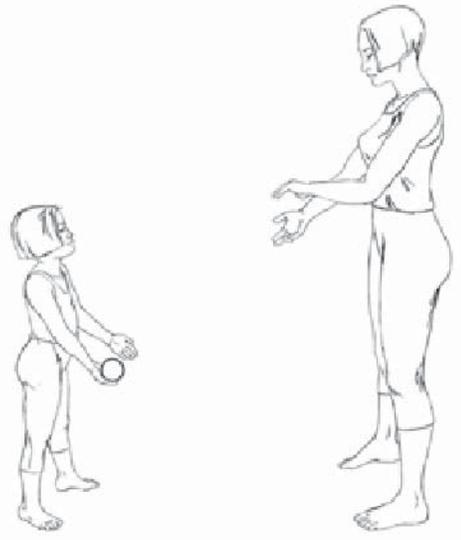
### Observations & Tips

Eyes should be focused on the ball. Fingers should be facing down when tossing a ball underhand. The foot opposite the tossing hand should be forward in an open stance.

## Underhand Toss

small foam ball, bean bag, tennis ball, hoop

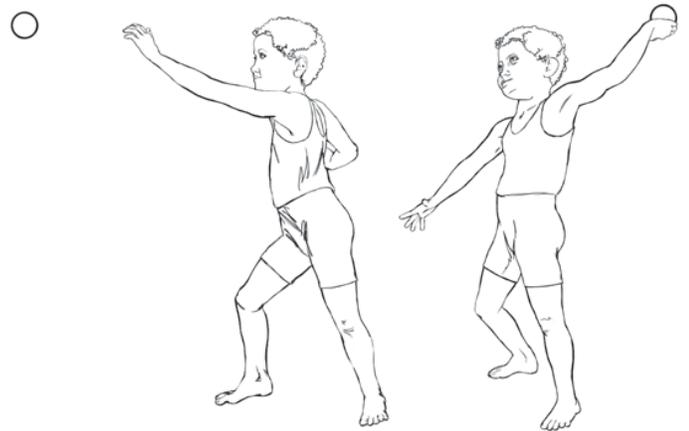
Encourage the child to stand with bent knees holding a small ball or bean bag with one hand. Ask the child to look at your hands and toss the ball into your hands. Progress to tossing an object through a hoop or toward a target.



## Two-Hand Throwing

slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball

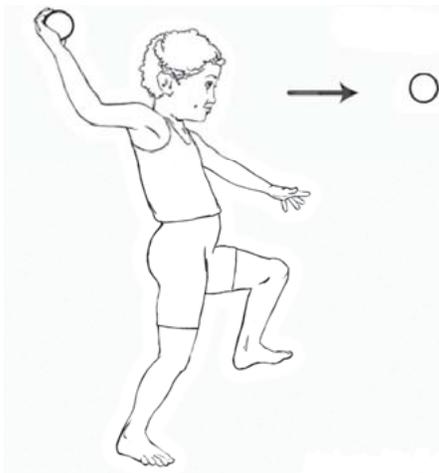
Using a sideways stance, encourage the child to rock back and forth. As the child rocks to the back foot, ask him/her to raise his/her arms up over the head. When rocking forward, encourage him/her to bring the arms forward to throw the ball.



## Overhand Throwing

small foam ball, tennis ball

Using the same technique as two-hand throwing, encourage the child to bring his/her arm back and forward overhead to throw a small ball toward your hands.



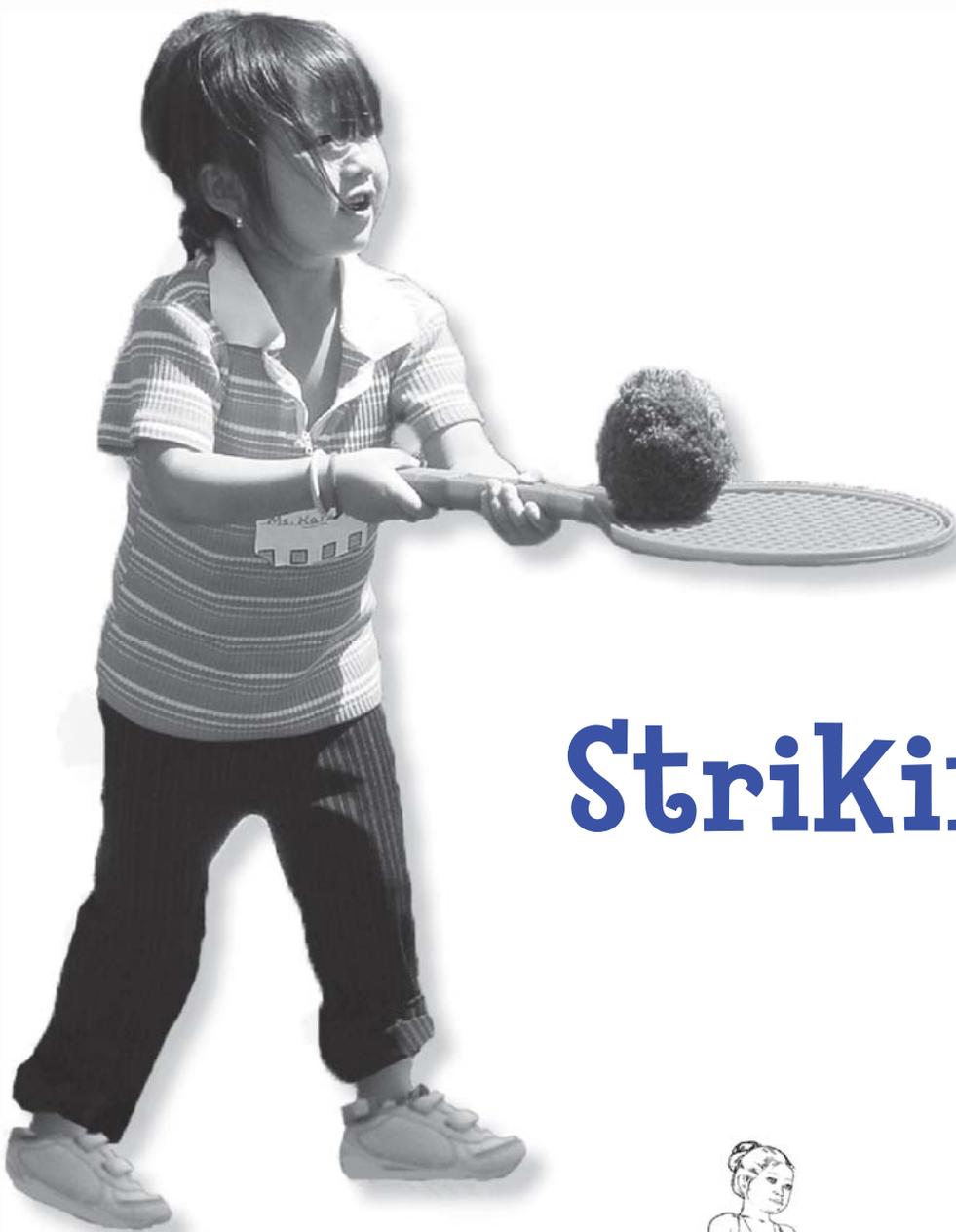
## Throwing for Distance and Accuracy

small foam ball, tennis ball, hoops, cones

Encourage the child to throw a small ball as high or far as possible. Set up markers at different distances so the child can focus toward a goal or target.

### Observations & Tips

The opposite leg steps toward the target and the hips and shoulders rotate forward. As the arm moves forward, it bends at the elbow and then straightens at ball release. The wrist snaps downward when the ball is released.



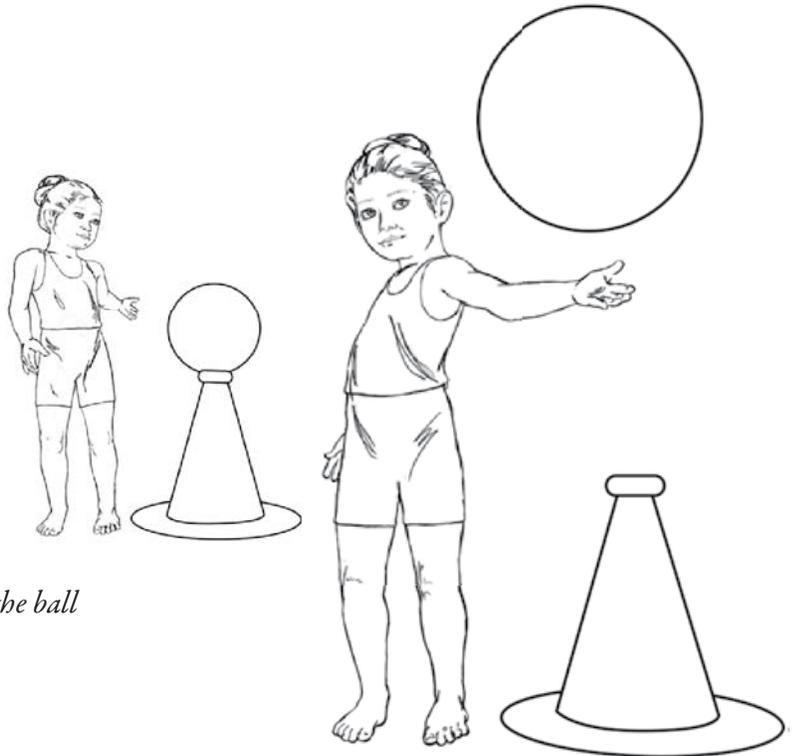
# Striking

## Handball

beach ball, cone, tee

Place a beach ball on a cone or tee. Have the child hit the beach ball with a fist or open hand.

*(Tip: If the ball does not balance on top of the cone, flip the cone upside down. Hold the cone while the child places the ball on the upside-down base of the cone and hits it.)*



## Ball Tapping

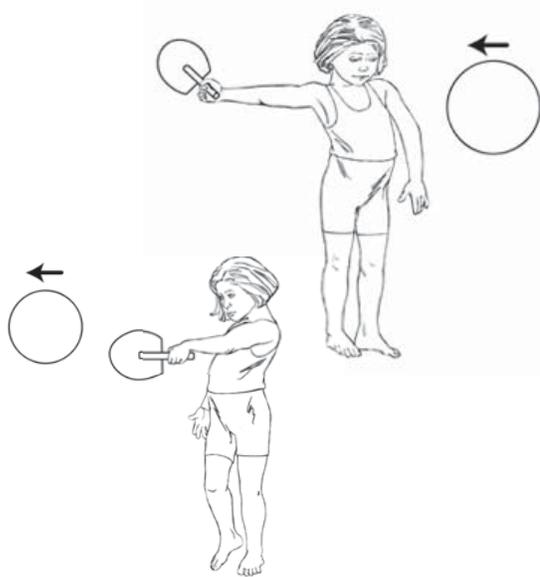
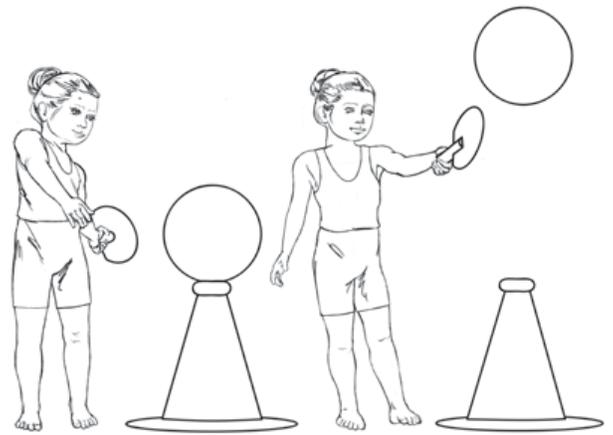
beach ball, slow motion ball

Tap a beach ball toward the child and have him/her tap the ball back toward you with an open hand. Progress to having the child in a sideways, ready position. Toss beach ball to the child and have him/her hit the ball with an open hand.

## Side Striking

beach ball, slow motion ball, paddle,  
junior size racket, plastic bat

Using a sideways stance, encourage the child to strike a tossed beach ball or other ball with a racket, paddle, stick, bat, etc.



## Intermediate Tennis/Softball

beach ball, slow motion ball, small foam ball, tennis ball,  
junior size racket, plastic bat

Using a sideways stance, encourage the child to strike a bounced beach ball or other ball with a racket, paddle, stick, etc.

## Beginning Hockey

beach ball, slow motion ball, small foam ball, tennis ball, dowel,  
junior size plastic hockey stick, junior size plastic golf club

Place a large ball on the ground. Encourage the child to be positioned sideways to the ball. Have the child hold onto a dowel, hockey stick, golf club, etc., with two hands and encourage him/her to strike the ball with the club or stick.



### Observations & Tips

Encourage the child to stand sideways to the ball with good balance. Markers can be used for the child to stand on. Eyes should be focused on the ball. Encourage follow-through by having the child twist his/her belly forward and/or clapping the hands out in front. If the child is not transferring weight, have him/her rock forwards and backwards while standing on markers.



# Kicking



## Kicking

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball

Place a ball on the ground and have the child stand behind it. Have the child kick the ball toward you with his/her preferred foot.

## Penalty Kick Prep

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball

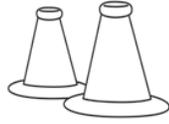
Place a ball on the ground and have the child run up to the ball to kick it toward you.



## Kicking for Distance

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, cones, floor markers

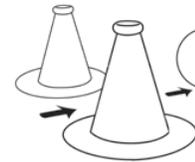
Encourage the child to run up to a ball and kick it for distance by having him/her kick a ball past various markers.



## Kicking for Accuracy

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, cones, floor markers

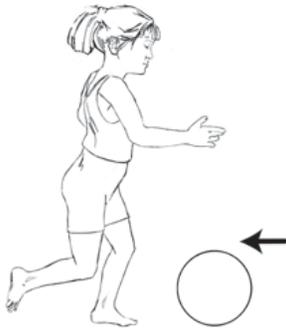
Place a ball on the ground. Encourage the child to run up to the ball to kick it toward a goal or between two cones.



## Give and Go

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, cones, floor markers

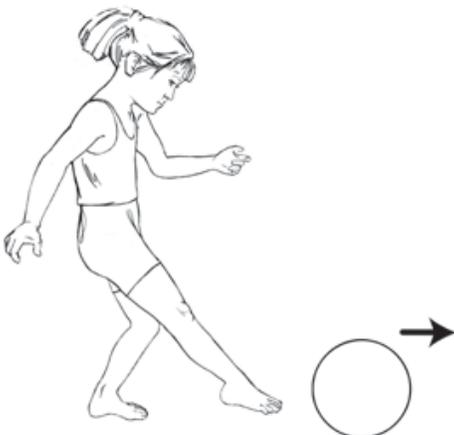
Kick a ball toward the child and encourage him/her to kick the moving ball toward a goal or between two cones.



## Kickball

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, cones, floor markers

Roll or kick a ball toward the child and encourage him/her to kick the moving ball to you or toward a goal or target.



### Observations & Tips

Eyes should be focused on the ball. Non-Kicking foot is just behind and to the side of the ball. The Kicking leg should bend at the knee for a back swing and should follow through. The opposite arm swings forward as the ball is Kicked.



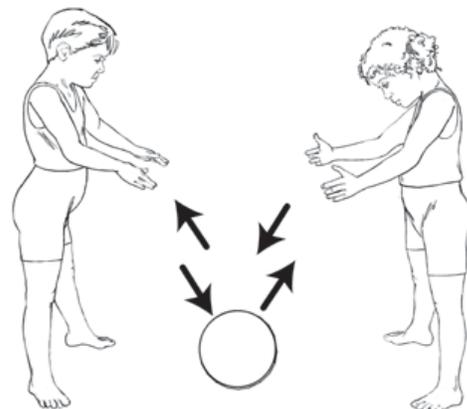
# Advanced Skills



## Bounce & Catch

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size basketball, playground ball, small foam ball, tennis ball

Stand behind the child and assist him/her in bouncing and catching a ball. Then, stand in front of the child and bounce the ball so the child can catch it without moving. Encourage the child to bounce pass the ball back to you. Progress to greater distances between players and smaller balls.



## Dribble

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size basketball, playground ball

Stand behind the child and assist him/her in bouncing a beach ball with two hands, but without catching it. Provide less assistance as child's skill improves. Progress to a different ball, then progress to bouncing (dribbling) with one hand.

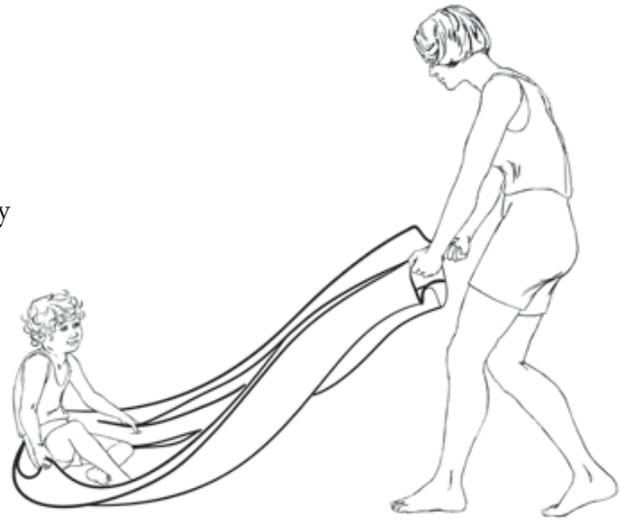
## Observations & Tips

These skills require the integration of strength, balance, vision, and coordination. Observe which components of the skill are well developed and which are not. Basic skills for these activities can be developed through the prior demonstrations.

## Magic Carpet Ride

blanket and smooth surface like a gymnasium floor, sit-down scooters, a snow sled

Have the child sit on a blanket while holding onto the edges of the blanket. Grasp the blanket on the side that the child is facing. Slowly begin to pull the child until they slide along the floor. Gradually increase the speed as the child becomes more comfortable.



## Skipping floor markers

Place a series of floor markers on the ground in a straight line. Have the child step onto the marker and then perform a low hop on that foot. As the hopping foot lands, place the other foot on the next marker.

## Galloping floor markers

Place a series of floor markers on the ground in a straight line. Have the child step onto the marker with his/her preferred leg. Then, ask the child to bring up the trailing foot to the marker and hop onto it. Continue leading with the preferred foot.



## Punting beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size basketball, playground ball

Encourage the child to practice one-legged standing balance with the leg forward and the arms out to the sides. Then, have the child swing the kicking leg back and forward. Next, have the child hold a beach ball in both hands, drop it and kick it.

# Congratulations!

Your child has completed Young Athletes and has developed many of the fundamental skills designed to prepare him/her to take part in a variety of sports.

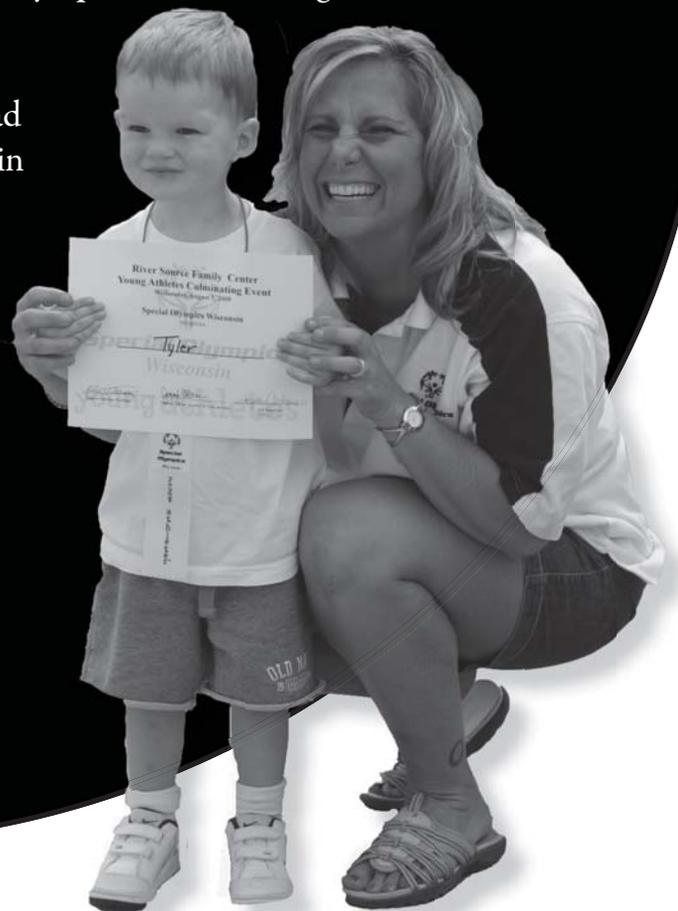
Aptitude or quick mastery of specific skill sets could indicate a talent in a specific sport. For example, running between markers is a skill used in track and field competition, dribbling a ball around cones translates into basketball skills, running and kicking either a moving or stationary ball is the foundation for soccer. Regardless of your child's level of achievement, there is a Special Olympics sport for him/her.

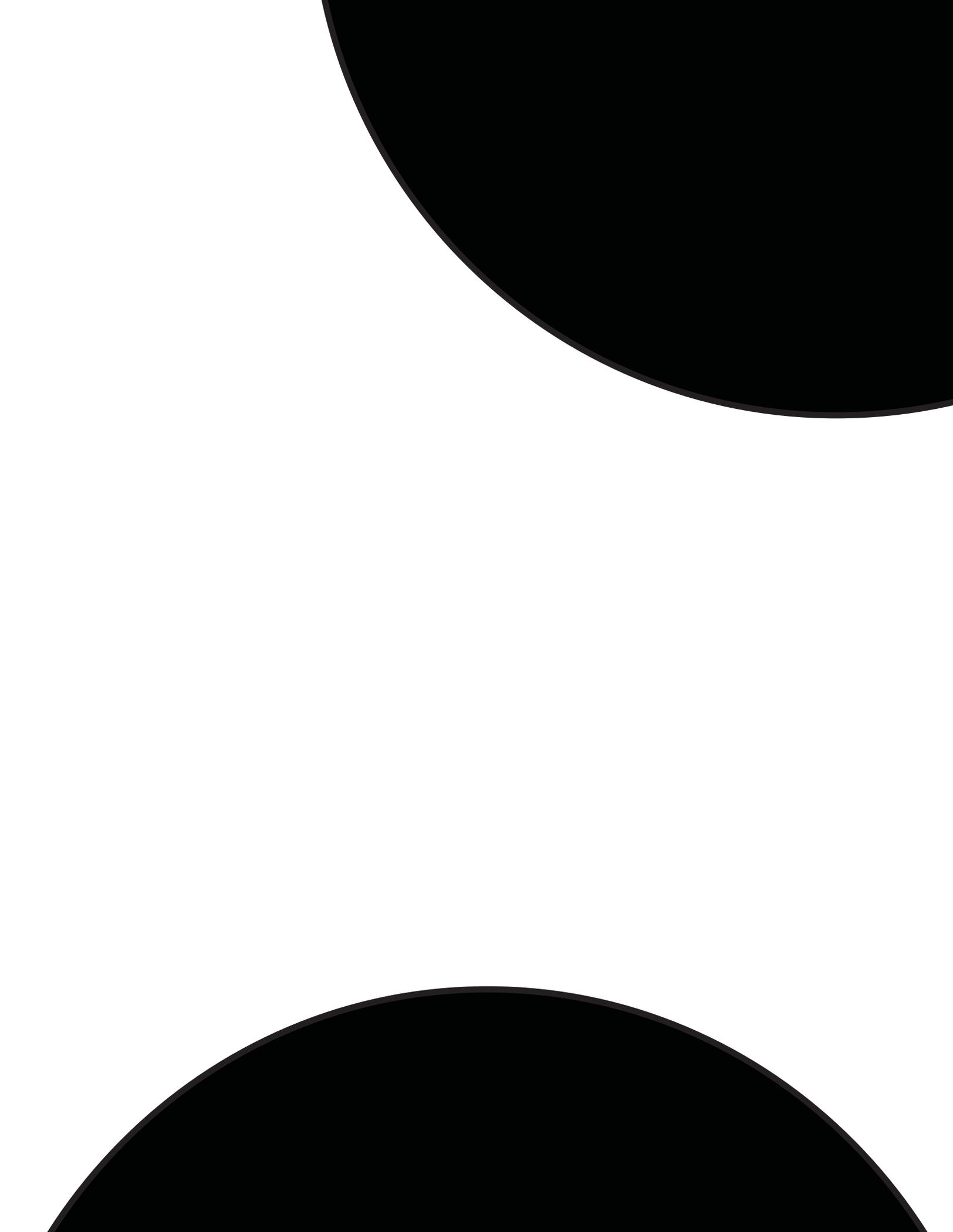
You have already started your child on the path to being a Special Olympics athlete through the activities included in this program. Until your young athlete is eligible to train and compete in Special Olympics, we hope you will take advantage of the other opportunities and resources available to families and young athletes by visiting [SpecialOlympicsWisconsin.org](http://SpecialOlympicsWisconsin.org).

Participation in Special Olympics Wisconsin requires a commitment to training and learning sports which will lead to a child's success in Special Olympics, greater acceptance in activities in the community, and enhanced self-esteem.

Just as any child is provided the opportunity to play baseball, soccer or basketball, so too can your child experience the benefit of playing and excelling in athletic activities.

Special Olympics Wisconsin invites you to join us in a lifetime of sports!







**Special Olympics**  
*Wisconsin*

**young athletes™**



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